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Maize or Indian Corn



Special Silver Medals awarded to our displays of Indian Corn. Massachusetts Horticultural Society at Boston, October 15, 1935. The Horticultural Society of New York at New York, November 7, 1935.

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CORN

Maize, or Indian Corn (*Zea Mays*), belongs to the great plant family Gramineae, or grasses. It is thought to have originated in central America as a hybrid of teosinite, a Mexican fodder grass, and an unknown plant belonging to the tribe Andropogoneae. Sturtevant tells us that there are over three hundred varieties of corn divided into seven main groups.

Corn is the outstanding crop of the United States. In both acreage and value it exceeds the combined crops of wheat, oats, rye, barley, rice, buckwheat, fruits, and nuts. It is the most beautiful and luxuriant of all the grain grasses.

Although corn is a strictly American product, developed by the natives centuries before the coming of the whites, its use has spread to nearly all sections of the earth. It is now the most common crop throughout South Africa, where it is known to the natives as "mealies." It is extensively grown throughout India.

Corn meal, a staple among the natives of Mexico, is made into thin, round cakes known as "tortillas." Our own American Indians regarded corn as a direct gift from the Author of Life to his children. It was highly prized, and to make light of or waste it was never permitted. Ceremonies were observed in the spring when planted, and their most solemn and imposing ceremonies were held just before the ripe ears were gathered in the fall. Among many Indian tribes the corn is known as "mother," because it nourishes and is the giver of life. Bancroft writes, "The maize springs from a warm, new field, and in the rich soil, with little aid from culture, outstrips the weeds, bears not fifty, but a thou-

sand-fold; if once dry is hurt neither by heat nor cold, may be preserved in a pit or cave for years. It is gathered from the field by hand, without knife or reaping hook, and becomes nutritious food by a simple roasting before a fire. The warrior, with a small supply of it in a leather girdle, and with his bow and arrows, was ready to travel at a moment's warning."

In her fascinating book, "Givers of Life," Emma F. Estabrook points out how much we owe to prehistoric man. She writes, "The ancestors of the present red men gave to the Europeans foods and other valuables before unknown to the world, peculiar to the American continent, and the sole result of the red man's discovery. As a house rests upon the hidden stones of its foundation, so the 20th century rests upon the stone ages of the past. Our modern improvement of plants is of little importance in comparison with prehistoric man's work in testing wild plants and in bringing them under cultivation. *Every single one of the important plant foods was discovered and brought into cultivation by prehistoric man.*"

Corn contains more oil than any other cereal, sometimes as high as 9%. It is rich in nitrogenous matter and high in protein. Lacking gluten, it cannot be leavened with yeast as can wheat flour. Extremely large amounts of green fodder, rich in sugar, can be grown by close planting of corn.

About nine-tenths of the corn crop is fed directly to stock. The other tenth is manufactured into a great variety of products, but mostly food stuffs. The three most important uses of corn are the manufacture of glucose, cereal foods, and alcohol. About three-fourths of all

the corn in the world is produced in our United States.

Corn will grow on almost any good ground. It prefers a warm, deep, well-drained soil. A reasonable amount of rainfall, especially in July and August, helps greatly to increase the crop and to fill out the maturing ears. Corn usually follows grass in the farm rotation. The heavy root system is adapted to coarse fertilizers, due to the comparatively long growing season. Fresh manure at the rate of five or six cords per acre, with 400 to 500 lbs. of acid phosphate harrowed in before planting, is the usual recommendation. Early growth is stimulated by the application of not over 400 lbs. of nitrate of soda or its equivalent along the rows. This should be done soon after the crop is out of the ground. Commercial fertilizers, if used in the hill, should be well mixed with the soil, as the tender corn roots are easily injured by strong chemicals. A safer practice is to broadcast the fertilizer, or to use manure under the hills. Plant approximately three feet apart each way. Cultivation should be shallow so as not to injure the feeding roots. A slight hilling up will help prevent the corn from breaking over when heavy with ears.

Regarding pests Dempsey says, "Corn smut is the only disease of consequence. Prevalent but seldom serious. Remove smut balls as soon as they appear. The European corn borer, cut-worm, and wireworm are the most important corn pests. As neither spraying nor dusting is effective, cultural practices must be resorted to."

Our Indian Corn, in all the colors of the rainbow, is a careful mixture of maize from the Mexican, Uti, and Hopi Indians. We hope you will want to plant some of it.